



Special School District Program Evaluation for Diagnostic Services

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Program Evaluation for Diagnostic Services

I. Program/Service Information

Name of Program or Services:

Diagnostic Services

Program Evaluation Questions

Is the incidence rate of African-American students identified with special education disabilities by Special School District consistent with the percentage of African-American students living within St. Louis County?

- a. Are there differences among the twenty-three component districts regarding the incidence of special education diagnoses for the African-American population?
- b. In districts where the percentage of African-American students identified with a Learning Disability is significantly higher than the percentage of African-American students enrolled, is professional judgment used more frequently than for non-African American students within those districts when an initial diagnosis of Learning Disability is given?

Personnel Responsible for Evaluation:

Michele Augustin, Director of Special Education, Related Services
Susan Welde, Diagnostic Effective Practice Specialist, West Region

Date of Evaluation:

January 2005 - June 2005

Goal/Objective of Program/Services:

To identify St. Louis County students who require special education services using criteria established by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for disabilities in the areas of Autism, Blindness, Deafness, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairment, Language Impairment, Learning Disability, Mental Retardation, Multiple Disabilities, Other Health Impairment, Speech Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, Vision Impairment, and Young Child with a Developmental Delay, using DESE criteria as stated.



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Brief description of relationship between program goals, CSIP and MSIP Standards:

Information gathered will address an ongoing concern within the District regarding over-identification of students eligible for special education and related services within St. Louis County. According to the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, each state that receives federal assistance under IDEA must provide for the collection and examination of data to determine if significant disproportionality, based on race and ethnicity, is occurring with respect to the identification of children with disabilities, placement in particular educational settings, and the incidence, duration, and type of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions. As of the 2003–2004 School Year, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education have monitored disproportionality of ethnic groups involving the identification of students requiring special education for federal reporting purposes. Potential outcomes of this type of data analysis would relate to Rolling Plan Goal 1: Improving student performance levels (Objective 5: Increasing LRE placements) and Objective 6: (Reducing incidence rate).

Demographic Description of Program:

Location:

Diagnostic services occur within the 23 component districts and all of the SSD special education and technical schools. Private/parochial and preschool students residing within the attendance areas of St. Louis County public schools are evaluated at their home schools or at a public location such as the St. Louis County libraries or one of the Special School District buildings.

Participants:

During the 2004-2005 School Year, special education diagnostic services were provided for St. Louis County students through referrals by parents and school teams, involving principals, counselors, teachers, learning consultants, and other building level staff. Effective Practice Specialists and the Director of Related Services offered technical support and coordinated services along with supervision by Area Coordinators assigned to each public school building. Staff completed 3377 initial evaluations: 2313 for students attending public schools, 344 for students within nonpublic schools, and 720 for preschool children. (See 5-year longitudinal data in **Table 1**) In addition, diagnostic staff participated on referral and IEP teams whenever evaluation for special education services was being considered.



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Number of Staff:

1 Director
4 Diagnostic Effective Practice Specialists
150 school psychologists, school psychological examiners, educational examiners, diagnostic teachers, and speech/language diagnosticians
4 Word Processors
3 Secretaries

Length of Program/Service:

Continuous

II. Description of Stakeholders Engagement in Program Evaluation:

Jaime Adcock, School Psychologist (Riverview Gardens)
Carla Addoh, Area Coordinator (Ferguson-Florissant)
Michele Augustin, Director (Related Services)
Jerry Dunn, Assistant Director, Community Psychological Services (University of Missouri-St. Louis)
Karen Gender, Area Coordinator (Maplewood/Richmond Heights)
Marsha Guilliams, Director (Riverview Gardens)
Carol Isbell, Special Education Teacher (Normandy)
Jeff Schneider, Speech/Language Effective Practice Specialist (Central Region)
Susan Welde, Diagnostics Effective Practice Specialist (West Region)

III. Evaluation Criteria for Programs/Services Offered:

- ❑ Special education profile data analysis for 23 Component Districts
- ❑ File review of 385 diagnostic summaries in four St. Louis County Districts for initial evaluations during the 2003-2004 School Year in which a diagnosis of Learning Disability was determined
- ❑ In order for a student to qualify by DESE criteria for a diagnosis of learning disability, a 22-point discrepancy between measured cognitive potential using the composite score on a comprehensive intelligence test and any academic area on a standardized achievement test must be documented. DESE does allow for professional judgment to be used for decisions regarding eligibility for special education services in the following diagnostic categories: Language Impairment, Mental Retardation, Multiple Disabilities, Specific Learning Disability, Speech-Fluency and Sound System Disorder, and Traumatic Brain Injury.



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- According to the Center for Innovations in Special Education, professional judgment is employed when decisions are made by qualified individuals with knowledge and experience regarding the appropriate course of action about matters that are not prescribed precisely by legal requirements or other legal authority. It is not merely an opinion made arbitrarily or capriciously, based on insights or feelings or hunches, to circumvent established criteria for proper decision-making. It is based on data from multiple sources and settings using a variety of collection methods, evidence and best professional practices regarding specific individuals, referral questions, and eligibility criteria. Opportunities for the use of professional judgment occur at many points in the evaluation process; for example, when determinations are made regarding whether an evaluation is warranted in a parent referral, whether additional data are required after examining existing information, when deciding which cognitive and achievement tests to administer, when identifying psychological processing deficits, when determining whether an adverse impact is present, when deciding when and where to observe student behaviors and what methodology to use during observations, and whether or not specialized instruction is required for a student to make adequate progress in learning.

IV. Data Collection Methodology:

Special Education District Profile Data involving Race/Ethnicity Data Analysis for the 2003-2004 School Year was obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for all twenty-three component districts via DESE's website.

The data was flagged by DESE in areas of possible under- or over-representation within racial groups for each diagnostic classification. Flags indicated that the actual number of students identified with a specific disability in each category was at least ten over or under the expected number based on percentages of students enrolled within each district. Possible racial disproportionality would therefore be indicated in those diagnostic categories.

The Profile Data was first analyzed to identify those component districts in which the African American population was over-represented in any diagnostic category. Of the twenty-three component districts, sixteen were flagged by DESE as having a potential over-representation of African-Americans with a categorical diagnosis of Specific Learning Disability (Affton, Brentwood, Clayton, Ferguson-Florissant, Hazelwood, Kirkwood, Ladue, Lindbergh, Maplewood-Richmond Heights, Mehlville, Parkway, Pattonville, Ritenour, Rockwood, University City, and Webster Groves), four with Mental Retardation (Ferguson-Florissant,



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Hazelwood, Parkway, and Rockwood), two with Emotional Disturbance (Parkway and Rockwood), and one with Speech Impairment (Rockwood). Due to the widespread over-representation of African-Americans in the diagnostic category of Specific Learning Disability, the committee chose this disability as the focus of its investigation. **(Table 2)**

In an effort to further narrow the sample of cases to be used for the file review, the committee identified those districts for which the incidence rate of Specific Learning Disability in the African-American population was nearly double the expected rate according to enrollment data. Three hundred eighty five student file reviews were therefore conducted for students assigned to four districts (Clayton, Mehlville, Parkway, and Rockwood) to determine the following information:

- 1) Race of student
- 2) Gender of student
- 3) Whether or not professional judgment was used to determine eligibility

Whenever the 22-point discrepancy was not met using the composite score from a Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, Wechsler Intelligence Scale, or Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Cognitive Ability, the determination was made that professional judgment was used to establish eligibility for that particular student.

V. Results

The committee reviewed 385 initial evaluations in which a diagnosis of Specific Learning Disability was determined from the four identified St. Louis County School Districts. Data was collected regarding the race, gender, and attending school for each student and whether or not professional judgment was used to determine eligibility for special education services in the area of learning disability.

An analysis of the data involving the use of professional judgment in eligibility determination for African-American as compared to non African-Americans revealed the following statistically significant trends:

1. Of the 385 case studies, professional judgment was used to determine eligibility for special education in the area of Specific Learning Disability for 134, or over one-third, of the cases.
2. In the population of students diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability in the four districts, professional judgment was used for 42.9% (45 of 105



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evaluations) of the African-American students, while 31.8% (89 of 280 evaluations) of the non-African American students were diagnosed using professional judgment. This finding is statistically significant and indicates that an African-American student is more likely to be diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability using professional judgment than a non-African American student. **(Table 3)**

3. When analyzing the individual data for each component district, however, in only one of the four districts would an African-American student be more likely to receive a diagnosis of learning disability using professional judgment than a non-African American student.
4. In the population of students diagnosed with a learning disability in the four districts, professional judgment was used for 30.8% (78 of 253 evaluations) of males and 42.1% (56 of 133 evaluations) of females. This finding is also considered to be statistically significant and indicates that a female is more likely to receive a diagnosis of learning disability with the use of professional judgment than a male.
5. Likewise, in only one of the four districts would a female student be more likely to receive a diagnosis of learning disability using professional judgment than a male student.

Time spent on program evaluation:

200 hours

Strengths of program/service:

1. Diagnostic summaries are written in such a manner that the determination regarding use of professional judgment is easily identifiable.
2. With the exception of Learning Disabilities, overrepresentation of African-American students within other diagnostic categories is limited to a few component districts.
3. Since the 2003-2004 school year, diagnosticians have been encouraged to consult with their Effective Practice Specialists before using professional judgment to determine eligibility for special education services.
4. The current infrastructure allows access and retrieval of necessary data and supports the data collection and monitoring process.



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5. Since the 2003-2004 school year, many component districts along with their school psychologists have been focusing on a preventative as opposed to remedial model of intervention for at-risk students. Productivity expectations have been adjusted to allow prereferral consultative activities to occur rather than emphasizing the test and place model.
6. High quality professional development began for diagnostic staff during the 2002-2003 School Year with training provided in use of the Problem Solving Model and Data-Driven Decision Making, which included an overview of the model, consultation for behavioral concerns, and consultation for academic concerns. Since then, trainings have been available to diagnostic staff during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 School Years in the areas of Quality Eligibility Determination, Problem-Solving, and Curriculum Based Measurement in an effort to support students within the general education setting and to improve skills in accurately diagnosing students in need of special education services. Table 1 demonstrates the trend of initial evaluations increasing through the 2001-2002 School Year prior to the initiation of the training sequence in Data-Driven Decision Making. As more staff is trained in Data-Driven Decision Making, fewer initial evaluations are occurring, as more students are able to maintain placements in the general education setting without the need for special education services. **(Table 4)**

Concerns regarding program/service:

1. African-American students are overrepresented in special education in sixteen of the twenty-three partner districts within St. Louis County.
2. The diagnosis of Learning Disabilities was overrepresented in the African-American population in seventy percent of the districts of St. Louis County, according to 2003-2004 Special Education District Profile Data involving Race/Ethnicity Data Analysis from the DESE website.
3. In the 385 initial evaluations in which a diagnosis of Learning Disability was given, professional judgment was used in one-third of the cases.
4. According to statistical analysis, the use of professional judgment for eligibility determination of Learning Disabilities was more likely to occur with African-Americans and females during the 2003-2004 School Year using overall data from the four districts identified.
5. Inconsistency in decision-making regarding the appropriateness of a special education referral is a concern within St. Louis County.



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6. Professional judgment by diagnosticians is not consistently applied with the same rigor across the component districts. Specific guidelines have not been developed by DESE to direct school psychologists toward the appropriate use of professional judgment in diagnostic decision-making.

Recommendations regarding program/service:

1. Before using professional judgment for a diagnosis of Learning Disability, diagnostic staff should be required to consult with their Effective Practice Specialists and Area Coordinators and document the support for the diagnosis within the diagnostic summary. Include participation of Area Coordinators and Effective Practice Specialists in eligibility determinations where the use of professional judgment may be required.
2. Survey diagnostic staff to determine possible reasons for use of professional judgment in the diagnosis of Learning Disabilities so that education and training regarding appropriate uses of professional judgment can be initiated.
3. Encourage component districts to participate in trainings on the topics of Quality Eligibility Determinations, Problem-Solving, and use of Curriculum Based Measurement in an effort to improve appropriateness of referrals for special education evaluation.
4. Form a committee to evaluate and revise the current referral packet to include methods to document data collection regarding response to interventions that have been implemented to support student performance within the general education setting.
5. Investigate the other diagnostic categories of over-identification of African-Americans within St. Louis County: Mental Retardation, Emotional Disturbance, and Speech Impairment.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Joint Review process in each component district to determine which model results in better identification of students requiring an evaluation for special education services.
7. Consideration must be given to differences vs. disabilities, previous educational experiences, impact of environment on learning, etc. when determining whether a referral is appropriate for special education evaluation.



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8. When a student fails to meet established DESE criteria for eligibility for special education and related services, the rationale to support the use of professional judgment should be clearly stated within the diagnostic summary.

VI. Action Plan for Recommendations as a Result of Program Evaluation

Person responsible to champion action plan

Michele Augustin, Director of Special Education, Related Services

Timeframe for reporting updates to Board of Education

Quarterly updates through the 2005-2006 School Year

_____ Date: _____
Signature of Administrator Responsible for Chairing Evaluation



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TABLE 1

Initial Diagnostic Evaluations for Component Districts					
DISTRICT	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
AFFTON	126	120	136	91	58
BAYLESS	51	70	87	55	28
BRENTWOOD	41	47	47	47	26
CLAYTON	64	63	69	32	29
FERGUSON-FLORISSANT	335	346	345	246	180
HANCOCK PLACE	62	57	56	39	41
HAZELWOOD	588	626	568	467	261
JENNINGS	111	106	140	136	123
KIRKWOOD	245	205	172	144	100
LADUE	105	106	132	105	97
LINDBERGH	239	262	249	189	130
MAPLEWOOD-RICHMOND HEIGHTS	67	56	57	54	47
MEHLVILLE	410	344	389	327	217
NORMANDY	203	240	216	143	137
PARKWAY	796	820	850	692	697
PATTONVILLE	224	249	167	128	117
RITENOUR	246	253	251	192	183
RIVERVIEW	263	319	330	269	242
ROCKWOOD	753	763	564	466	377
SPECIAL	4	9	10	0	2
UNIVERSITY CITY	127	160	136	124	76
VALLEY PARK	67	47	54	53	38
WEBSTER	164	178	226	190	143
WELLSTON	14	14	34	34	28
PRIVATE	0	0	1	0	0
TOTALS	5305	5460	5286	4223	3377



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TABLE 2: DISTRICT RACE/ETHNICITY DATA ANALYSIS (2003-2004)

OVERREPRESENTATION OF DISABILITY IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN POPULATION

DISTRICT	AUT	HI	ED	LI	MR	MU	LD	SP	TBI	VI	OHI	YCDD
AFFTON							143%					
BAYLESS												
BRENTWOOD							150%					
CLAYTON							179%					
FERG-FLOR					127%		109%					
HANCOCK PLACE												
HAZELWOOD					139%		107%					
JENNINGS												
KIRKWOOD							154%					
LADUE							180%					
LINDBERGH							157%					
MAPLEWOOD RH							146%					
MEHLVILLE							212%					
NORMANDY												
PARKWAY			205%		172%		209%					
PATTONVILLE							125%					
RITENOUR							118%					
RIVERVIEW												
ROCKWOOD			263%		223%		221%	129%				
UNIVERSITY CITY							107%					
VALLEY PARK												
WEBSTER							178%					
WELLSTON												



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TABLE 3

PERCENTAGES OF GROUPS IN WHICH PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT USED FOR ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION					
Districts	Clayton	Mehlville	Parkway	Rockwood	Overall
Percentage Males	33.3%	32.0%	33.0%	28.3%	30.8%
Percentage Females	60.0%	30.6%	54.5%	40.7%	42.1&%
Percentage of African-Americans	25.0%	31.4%	53.3%	38.7%	42.9%
Percentage of non African-Americans	75.0%	31.1%	30.5%	31.6%	31.8%



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TABLE 4

TRAINING SEQUENCE FOR HIGH QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Sequence 1: Problem Solving Series (September 2002 through November 2003)
School Psychological Services: A Problem-Solving Approach
Behavioral Interventions for Problem Solving
Implementation of the Problem Solving Model: The Academic-Behavioral Interface
Sequence 2: Quality Eligibility Determination Strand (Academy I Year II)
Quality Eligibility Determination
Diagnostic Procedures for Language Impairment
Diagnostic Procedures for Autism
Diagnostic Procedures for Other Health Impairment
Diagnostic Procedures for Emotional Disturbance
Diagnostic Procedures for Low Incidence Diagnoses
Sequence 3: Problem Solving Strand (Academy II)
Consultation: Solution-Focused Counseling
Curriculum Based Measurement I and II
Section 504 and IDEA
Functional Behavior Assessment